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How language choices in feedback change with technology: Engagement in text and screencast feedback on ESL writing

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ABSTRACT

An understanding of the impact of our technological choices in giving feedback has become a necessity for instructors. However, few studies have explored how technology choices might be influencing the nature and language of feedback. The present study investigates how the modes of video and text change the language used to give feedback and by doing so, shift its interpersonal aspects. The study employs ENGAGEMENT, from the APPRAISAL framework, to investigate parallel collections of screencast and MS Word feedback from three English as a second language (ESL) writing instructors over four assignments in intact classes. This ENGAGEMENT analysis highlights how other voices are considered in the feedback and provides understanding of the position of the instructor and the role of the feedback itself and how they shift across modes. Text feedback was found to position the instructor as a single authority while video feedback better preserved student autonomy, offering feedback as suggestion and advice and positioning the instructor as one of many possible opinions. Understanding these differences can help instructors choose technology that will best support their pedagogical purposes.

Student autonomy and ability to maintain control can be critical in feedback on student work, especially written work. It can be provided or revoked in the wording of comments, the way instructors approach a piece of writing and perhaps through the technology used to create and deliver the feedback. The affective impact of feedback can be significant with students reporting internalizing harsh negative comments to the point where even adult students feel incapable, disrespected and unmotivated (Treglia, 2008) and students with low self-esteem feel defeated and may even drop out of a course (Young, 2000). While instructors cannot always predict the impact their feedback will have on a student, instructors need to be aware of the way they convey their feedback and the way the technology they use to create and deliver that feedback impacts the message that they send.

Previous work has suggested that students perceive the interpersonal impact of feedback differently depending on the technological mode of feedback. For instance, screencast feedback has been perceived as conveying a more conversational tone (Anson, Dannels, Laboy, & Carneiro, 2016; Warnock, 2008) and providing for better student-teacher connections (Anson et al., 2016) and an enhanced a sense of instructor presence (Grigoryan, 2017; Harper, Green, & Fernandez-Toro, 2015). Students often see it as more personal (Ali, 2016; Anson, 2018; Anson et al., 2016; Edwards, Dujardin, & Williams, 2012; Harper et al., 2015; Sommers, 2013; Warnock, 2008) and as offering more explanation (Cunningham, 2019; Elola & Oskoz, 2016; Thompson & Lee, 2012). Similar to audio feedback (Ice, Curtis, Phillips, & Wells, 2007), screencast feedback is seen as being more caring, considerate, friendly, encouraging and supportive (Anson, 2018; Edwards et al., 2012; Ryan, Henderson, & Phillips, 2016; Thompson & Lee, 2012) than written. Given the potential demotivating factors in feedback, the promise of technology to mitigate negative effects and prompt

Abbreviations: ESL, English as a second language, English for speakers of other languages; SFL, systemic functional linguistics

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positive reactions in this way is of importance to learning and teaching.

Because of the potential for negative feedback to provoke unproductive reactions, managing negative feedback is expected and has been identified as a particular concern in instructor feedback (F. Hyland, 2000; K. Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Yelland, 2011). While mitigation may not impact the extent or quality of revisions (Treglia, 2009), Treglia (2008) reported that first and second language composition students perceived the use of mitigation strategies as showing respect and politeness and found them to positively contribute to motivation. Students highlighted the agency they felt they had when comments employed mitigation strategies, such as hedging. Emotional considerations, mitigation of negative feedback and strategies to preserve student agency are key interpersonal considerations for feedback.

Interpersonal considerations, however, may vary in part with the mode of feedback. The nature of screencasts, in particular, has been seen to contribute to the interpersonal or relational aspects of feedback as it may make instructors naturally more aware of interpersonal dimensions of communication (Anson et al., 2016; Cunningham, 2017; Crook et al., 2012). Students in Anson et al.'s (2016) study subsequently felt more respected and guided rather than criticized when receiving screencast comments (as opposed to text feedback), which allowed them to better focus on their feedback and revisions.

Apart from studies of perceptions (e.g. Anson et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2015), few studies that investigate screencast feedback have focused on interpersonal aspects. While studies of screencast feedback frequently cite perceptual differences, they are often unable to establish significant differences between the feedback provided by the two modes.

Given that the language used in speaking and writing tends to broadly differ (Biber, 1988; Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd, & Helt, 2002; Halliday, 2002; Sperling, 1996) and even the same argument conveyed in writing and video tends to have different emphasis, structure and delivery by mode (B. E. Smith, Kiili, & Kauppinen, 2016), we would expect to see differences in the language choices made in feedback across different modes such as text and screencast. Thus, it seems likely that an aspect of interpersonal differences between screencast and text feedback could be identified through an analysis of the feedback itself with a focus on language.

In a recent small-scale study of screencast video and text feedback in an ESL writing class, Cunningham (2017) demonstrated the potential of using the APPRAISAL framework, a functional linguistic framework focused on evaluative language and interpersonal meaning, to investigate multimodal feedback such as screencast. The results showed differences in the positioning of the reviewer (feedback provider) and the purpose of feedback as seen through the language resources employed in the feedback. Specifically, the screencast video feedback positioned the reviewer as one of many possible opinions and feedback as offering suggestions and choice while text feedback more often positioned the reviewer as a source of authority and feedback as correction. While these findings are encouraging, the study considered the feedback of a single reviewer for a small number of students in an intact class the reviewer was not teaching. With the promise of potentially finding an empirical basis in the feedback itself for the interpersonal differences often perceived in screencast and text feedback, there is a need for studies to similarly consider contextualized instructor screencast and text feedback in more classes over a longer period of time.

In an effort to expand our understanding of the interpersonal dimension of screencast feedback, the present study employs a similar functional linguistic approach through the APPRAISAL framework to investigate evidence of the interpersonal in screencast and text formative instructor feedback in three university level ESL writing courses. Within this framework, it focuses on ENGAGEMENT, or the space for dialogue, in the feedback to get at the previously identified student perceptions of screencast feedback as conversational and offering autonomy.

1. Engagement under the appraisal framework

The APPRAISAL framework (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2015) focuses on the interpersonal meaning in evaluative language and the use of language resources to manage relational positioning and evaluation. The framework has potential for offering insights into the interpersonal aspects of multimodal and technology-mediated feedback (Cunningham, 2017) as it can be applied to both written (e.g., Adendorff & Smith, 2014; Gales, 2011; Macken-Horarik, 2003; Martin, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2007; Pounds, 2011; J.; Smith & Adendorff, 2014; White, 2012) and spoken (e.g., Caldwell, 2009; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Ferguson, 2010) texts. The framework (Martin & White, 2005) entails three systems—ENGAGEMENT, focused on the space for other voices in a text; ATTITUDE, focused on the evaluations made in a text and GRADUATION, a scaling factor applied over the other two. Of these systems, it is ENGAGEMENT that offers key insight into the interpersonal considerations for dialogue and autonomy in feedback.

ENGAGEMENT (Martin & White, 2005) considers how the space for dialogue is expanded or contracted. It focuses on author positioning and how that position leaves room for or attempts to shut down other voices or perspectives. Specific types of ENGAGEMENT are coded along a network diagram as seen in seen in Fig. 1. ENGAGEMENT tends to hinge on the verb, so each main clause can be coded.

Our focus is primarily on diglossic (considering multiple voices) ENGAGEMENT and how the space for dialogue undergoes expansion and contraction as different resources are employed. Contracting resources branch into PROCLAIM and DISCLAIM, which tend to have a positive or negative quality respectively. These resources highlight the writer/speaker's authority by closing down the space for other voices. Common uses of contracting resources in feedback include direct error corrections and direct statements about the quality of the student text.

Expanding resources, on the other hand, open the space for dialogue by allowing other voices or opinions room. This is done by taking a stance as one of many possible opinions (ENTERTAIN) or offering a neutral report of another (ATTRIBUTE). Suggestions in feedback are a common type of ENTERTAIN. These frequently include lower modals such as could or might. In feedback, ATTRIBUTE most often appears as using the verb *said* to reference the student text. Using more expanding resources shows a greater attention to the interpersonal aspects of feedback by giving space for students to maintain control of their text and make choices. Thus, the balance of expanding and contracting resources may offer insights into the interpersonal nature of feedback.

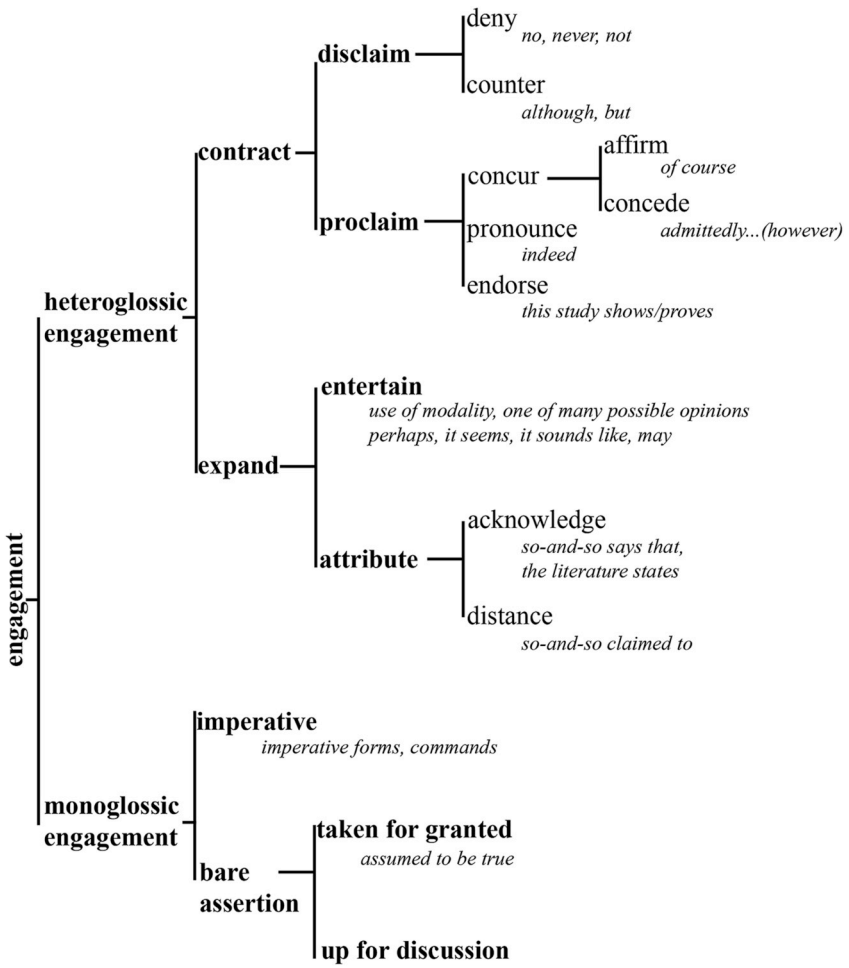

Fig. 1. ENGAGEMENT network adapted from Martin and White (2005) Fig. 3.4 p. 134.

2. Methods

The present study investigates ENGAGEMENT in screencast (video) feedback and MS Word comments (text feedback) in an effort to better understand the interpersonal dimension of feedback in the context of three university level ESL writing courses. In doing so, it focuses on the following research questions:

1. How are ENGAGEMENT resources used in text and video feedback?
2. How does this ENGAGEMENT resource use compare across text and video feedback?

2.1. Data collection

Text and video formative feedback provided with the purpose of prompting student revisions was collected from three instructors of university level academic ESL writing courses primarily for international undergraduate students at a large university in the United States under IRB approval. The instructors included two teaching assistants (one American (A) and one international (B)) in the final semester of their TESOL MAs and one experienced American instructor (C), each teaching one (B and C) or two (A) sections of university level ESL writing courses. Instructors A and C taught an essay writing course while instructor B taught a paragraph writing course. Each instructor gave feedback to their classes across four major assignments over the course of a single semester as indicated in Table 1 using a crossover design where the group of students receiving each mode switched at the halfway point.

Each student paper was given either video or text feedback, but not both. Instructors were given basic training on software features and study procedures. Video feedback consisted of a screencast recording of the student work on the computer screen with audio instructor commentary. No written feedback was given in the videos, but the mouse was used to gesture to parts of the writing being discussed. All three instructors were giving screencast feedback for the first time and gave the feedback using a provided copy of TechSmith's *SnagIt* screencasting software. Text feedback was given using the review features of Microsoft Word including inserted

Table 1
Number of video and text feedback files per instructor by assignment.

Instructor	Assignment								Total
	1		2		3		4		
	Video	Text	Video	Text	Video	Text	Video	Text	
A	17	17							**34**
B	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	**56**
C	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	**46**
Total	**30**	**30**	**13**	**13**	**13**	**13**	**12**	**12**	**136**

Note a: Instructor A had to end participation early for reasons unrelated to the study and so only feedback on Assignment 1 is included in the data.
Note b: Only 1 draft of each assignment was given formative feedback for the study. Thus, each column denotes unique drafts each written by a different student.

comments and tracked changes.[1]

The data collection resulted in 68 video and 68 text feedback files[2] as seen in Table 1. This included a total of almost nine hours of video feedback. On average, each video was about seven and a half minutes long. Video length averages varied by instructor: A (5 min, 12 s), B (6 min, 26 s), and C (10 min, 57 s).

2.2. Data preparation

Before coding, the instructor comments were de-identified and extracted from the feedback files. Text feedback comments in comment bubbles and end comments were extracted and pasted into plain text files with samples of highlighted text in brackets. In-text actions were noted in brackets using the following notation:

Deletions: [deleted ___]
Error Codes: [intext- _word intext_]error code
Additions: [added___]
Replacements: [replaced ___ with ____]

The audio from video feedback files was extracted and sent to Rev.com for verbatim transcription. Each transcript was checked for accuracy by the researcher. The researcher de-identified the transcripts, fixed any inaccuracies, added emphasis and inserted timestamps and pause lengths using the transcription software F5. Transcripts were then exported as plain text files for coding.

2.3. Data coding

The plain text files were coded by the researcher in the UAM Corpus Tool (O'Donnell, 2014) while consulting the original feedback files as needed. Coding focused on ENGAGEMENT under the APPRAISAL framework.

Each main clause or action in the feedback was coded along the ENGAGEMENT network shown in Fig. 2, following Cunningham (2017). Table A1 in the appendix offers specific explanations and examples of each code. Although the entire network was considered in initial coding, the reporting of ENGAGEMENT results centers on the split between contracting (DISCLAIM/PROCLAIM) and expanding (ENTERTAIN/ATTRIBUTE) resources as outlined Fig. 2 since these were most prominent in the data and promising for analysis.

Approximately 10% of the files (in text-only form, blinded to video/text mode) were coded independently by an outside researcher to check coding scheme agreement. High percentage agreements were found (95% at the subtype level, 100% at higher levels). All files were coded by the researcher.

2.4. Analysis

Per text counts of ENGAGEMENT types and subtypes were output using the UAM corpus tool. Per text percentages of ENGAGEMENT resources were then computed to show the distribution of the types of resources used when ENGAGEMENT is enacted and allow for comparability across files of different lengths. This is similar to Eggins and Slade's (1997) percentage of clauses. To give balance across instructors who had different numbers of feedback files included in the study, means were computed for each instructor and averaged for totals. Quantitative comparisons focus on differences across modes (video and text) and by instructor with particular

[1] To maintain the focus of the study on video and text, instructors were told to avoid writing out comments in the video and to only use track-changes in text feedback for inline comments and changes if they usually did this and if so, to do so sparingly given the primary focus on comment bubbles and spoken comments.
[2] A feedback file is the MS Word document or video file containing the feedback on a given draft.

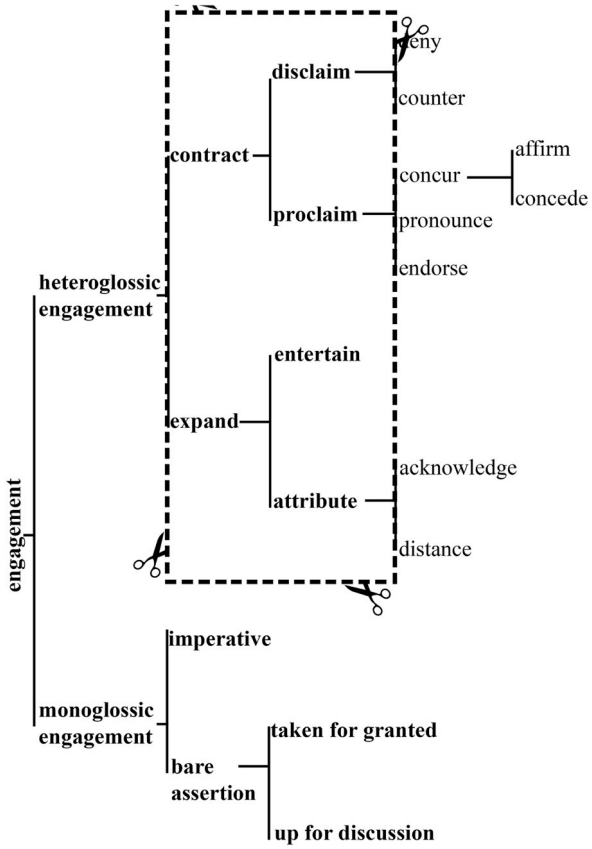

Fig. 2. ENGAGEMENT network adapted from Martin and White (2005) Fig. 3.4 p. 134, with Focal Area Outlined.

attention to the contracting/expanding split.

This split was then investigated using three-block binary logistic regression in SPSS to identify the degree of difference as an odds ratio between feedback modes (text and video) while accounting for instructor and assignment differences. The first block of the regression included only instructor variables. The second block added the assignment variables and the final block added the mode of feedback. This allowed for an investigation of whether or not the feedback variable added any value to the model after accounting for individual instructor and assignment differences.

3. Findings

The data coding resulted in 5954 instances of ENGAGEMENT. This included an average of 24 instances of ENGAGEMENT in each text feedback file and 62 in video across instructors, suggesting more clauses appeared in the video than the text.

The use of ENGAGEMENT resources showed a clear distinction between modes. Contracting resources on average made up 55% of the ENGAGEMENT resources in the text feedback but only 25% of the video. The expanding resources generally made up 26% of the text and 63% of the video ENGAGEMENT resources for a near reversal between modes. The video had a clear prevalence of expanding resources. This was true both overall and for each instructor individually, with each instructor devoting more than half of all ENGAGEMENT resources to expansion in the video and less than 40% to expansion in the text as seen in Fig. 3.

A three-block binary logistic regression was run with expanding resources as the outcome. Each block of the logistic regression was found to be significant as seen in Table 2, suggesting that subsequent blocks added value to the model. The resulting model, given its reliance on solely categorical variables, maintained a questionable fit (-2 Log Likelihood $= 7433.04$) and only classified 65.4% of observations correctly, though it was statistically significant (see Table 2). The regression (see Table 3) showed mode (video or text) to be significant and that with instructor and assignment held constant, a clause from video feedback was 4.715 times more likely to use expanding resources than a statement from text feedback. As to be expected, some instructor and assignment variables were also significant, though less impactful. These were not fully explored in the present study.

In the text feedback, ENGAGEMENT was more often contracting with prevalent use of DISCLAIM (18%) and PROCLAIM (48%). These ranged from statements such as “this is an incomplete sentence” to “this entire section is not written clearly enough to be understood” and deletions in the student text. The high use of contracting resources did not leave much room for students to consider additional perspectives, including their own.

Video, on the other hand, relied more expanding resources, often ENTERTAIN resources (47%) that positioned the instructor as one of

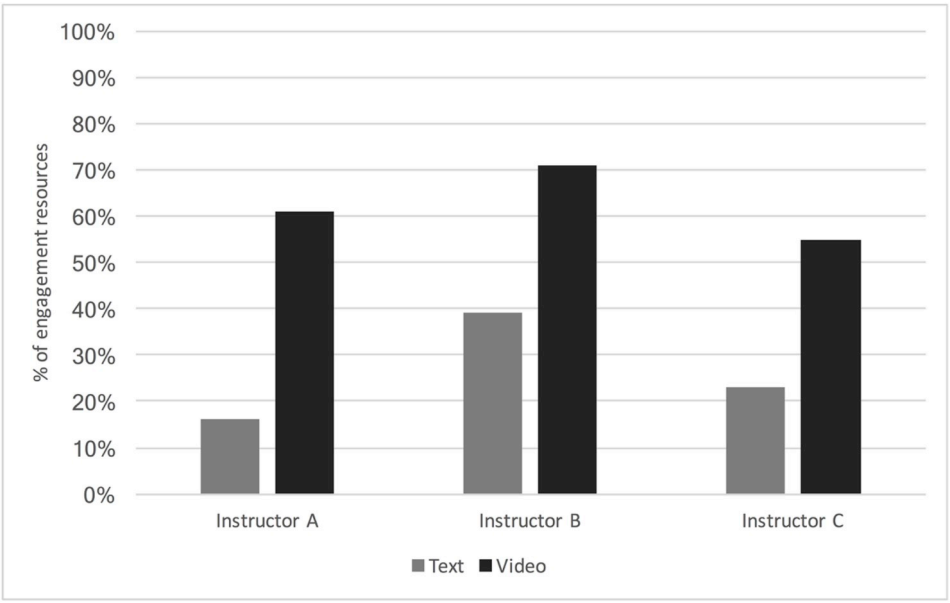

Fig. 3. Expanding ENGAGEMENT resources by instructor normed to 100 instances of ENGAGEMENT.

Table 2
Block significance for binary logistic regression on expansion.

Block	Chi-Square	*df*	Sig.
Block 1 – Instructor	142.766	2	< .001
Block 2- Assignment	14.066	3	.003
Block 3- Mode	625.224	1	< .001
Final Model	**782.055**	**6**	**< .001**

Table 3
Variables in logistic regression on expanding resources.

Variable	B	*SE*	Wald	*df*	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
InstructorB	.683	.101	45.510	1	**.000**	1.980	1.623	2.414
InstructorC	-.070	.092	.583	1	.445	.932	.779	1.116
Assgn_2	-.180	.086	4.335	1	**.037**	.836	.706	.990
Assgn_3	-.218	.094	5.325	1	**.021**	.804	.668	.968
Assgn_4	-.023	.086	.072	1	.789	.977	.825	1.158
Video	1.551	.066	560.163	1	**.000**	4.715	4.147	5.362
Constant	−1.174	.081	208.353	1	.000	.309		

many possible opinions. These included statements such as “I think that's a really nice ending for that paragraph” or “I'm not totally sure what you mean” and suggestions using modals such as “you could.” Rather than stating as fact the inherent deficiency in the student writing, the instructor at times personalized the issue. By stating that the instructor is not sure what is meant by the text rather than stating that the text simply cannot be understood, the instructor invites the student into a conversation and gives space for other perspectives and ongoing dialogue.

Expanding resources in the video also frequently consisted of attribution (25%), a resource nearly absent in the text feedback (1%), as instructors referenced the student text with phrases such as “here you say.” Despite both modes of feedback having a visual component of the student text and employing visual ways of referencing specific section of the text, it was only in video that instructors specifically referenced student writing with attributive resources in the feedback itself. This may be due in part to the temporal nature of the video where the instructor uses such attribution to orient both self and student to the new section and comment. This additionally suggests a degree of increased interpersonal awareness brought on by the medium.

4. Conclusion

This analysis has shown a clear difference between modes in the use of ENGAGEMENT resources, identifying differences in the interpersonal dimension of feedback by mode. The findings are in line with previous work on APPRAISAL in text and screencast feedback (Cunningham, 2017), even maintaining a similar difference in percentage of expanding resources used between video and text feedback (37% in the present study vs 33% by Cunningham (2017). The current study's identification of similar patterns with three instructors over a semester with varied assignments offers further evidence that suggests a difference in ENGAGEMENT resource use between text and screencast feedback.

The divergence in ENGAGEMENT resource use between text and screencast feedback was found primarily at the split between contracting and expanding resources. Text feedback was shown to employ more contracting resources. In doing so, it positions the instructor as an authority, with feedback is used to point out deficiencies. Video, on the other hand, employed primarily expanding ENGAGEMENT resources. In this way, the instructor is positioned as one of many possible opinions. Feedback in video was more likely to offer suggestions and advice, often casting future changes as opportunities for improvement. By doing so, video feedback encouraged student agency and choice and subtly suggested a model of writing and language where multiple avenues may be equally valid for addressing concerns. Using an abundance of expanding resources, video feedback showed attention to the interpersonal aspects of communicating with the student and offered feedback that seemed to attempt to mitigate discouraging aspects of feedback.

These findings are in line with screencast video feedback studies that highlight the personal nature (Ali, 2016; Anson, 2018; Anson et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2012; Harper et al., 2015; Sommers, 2013; Warnock, 2008), conversational tone (Anson et al., 2016; Warnock, 2008) and affective and interpersonal considerations (Anson, 2018; Edwards et al., 2012; Grigoryan, 2017; Harper et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2016; Thompson & Lee, 2012) of video feedback. The study thus offers theoretically grounded linguistic evidence in support of common student perceptions.

In considering the findings of the present study, it is useful to keep in mind that instructors were not asked to be more expansive in commenting with video or use more contracting resources when commenting in text. Thus, it is expected that it is the mode of video or text that is prompting such changes. This difference occurred without monitoring and without instructors attempting to consciously implement a linguistic change. It is likely that constraints in the mode, such as the limited space and ability to edit in text or the time based medium and spontaneous spoken aspect of video, influenced the use of ENGAGEMENT resources seen in the feedback.

If considering recommendations from composition studies to turn comments into a conversation and to not take control of a student's text (Straub, 2000), it seems that using video, a single concrete choice, seems to naturally push instructor feedback closer to these goals. In a time when instructors are balancing multiple duties and acting under increased cognitive load, having to make a single choice of technology to bring feedback more in-line with goals rather than a constant stream of monitoring can be a welcome option. Thus, instructors seeking to change the way they offer feedback might consider changing modes to see how their feedback, focus and position might shift.

The present study, in line with the results from Cunningham (2017), has shown that the mode of feedback seems to influence the interpersonal aspect of feedback as evidenced through language choices and that video may promote feedback practices that allow for greater student agency. Future work can build on the contributions of the present study through research that expands or focuses the scope of investigation. Studies might take the methods demonstrated here and apply them in a number of ways. Future research could investigate a range of technological modes of feedback in different contexts under the same principles applied here to see how different modes compare. These might include studies with audio feedback or one-on-one conferences or investigations of feedback in other types of courses. The present study applied only a small slice of the APPRAISAL framework. Future work might consider how other aspects of APPRAISAL, such as ATTITUDE, might give greater insight into technology-mediated feedback. In the present study, significant differences between individual instructors and over assignments throughout the semester were noted, though the effect of mode remained. However, instructor and assignment effects could not be fully explored in the present study. Future studies could investigate feedback across different groups of instructors based on experience, education, cultural or linguistic backgrounds, or technological confidence. Further, longitudinal studies could trace instructor feedback over time to see how timing, technological exposure or other factors might change the interpersonal considerations in feedback. Perhaps instructors settle in to a feedback pattern over time that has yet to be captured in nonwritten modes.

The use of APPRAISAL analysis at the intersection of technology and education research has only just begun. As the present study has demonstrated, APPRAISAL is a versatile framework that can offer insights into instructor feedback and positioning. Future work has many opportunities to expand on the present study in diversifying the use of APPRAISAL in educational technology research and in deepening our understanding of technology-mediated feedback.

Declarations of interest

None.

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Appendix

Table A1
ENGAGEMENT codes and examples

Diglossic ENGAGEMENT			
Expanding:			
Type	SubType	Explanation	Feedback Examples
ATTRIBUTE	Acknowledge	Neutral reporting	Say, here you have, you've got…
	Distance	Reporting with the aim of distancing often using the verb claim	*Not found in feedback data*
ENTERTAIN	Evidential	Mitigated, some personalized, some very hedged suggestions	It seems/looks, I think, maybe, perhaps, if/then
	Question	Rhetorical & faux questions	Is there anything else you can add to help your reader know what to expect?
	Directive	obligation, choice and suggestions	You might/could/should
Contracting:			
Type	**SubType**	**Explanation**	**Feedback Examples**
DISCLAIM	Deny	Negations, deletions	Not, no, [deleted_]
	Counter	Countering a statement, replacing text	But, however, [replaced _ with _]
PROCLAIM	Pronounce	Making pronouncements, clearly evaluative statements, added emphasis, additions	GOOD!!!, Great Topic Sentence!, [added ___]
	Concur	Affirm- agreeing with statements Concede- concessions, often precedes a counter	You have some good ideas, but…
	Endorse	Endorsing statements/positions/ideas	
	Justify	Giving reasons	Because…

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